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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2002

Draft report

Addendum

Rapporteur: Ms. Radhia **Achouri** (Tunisia)

II. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

2. Consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. At its 443rd meeting, on 9 September 2002, the Committee on Conferences considered an oral report by the Chairman on consultations with bodies concerning the utilization of the conference services available to them.

2. In keeping with section II, paragraph 16, of General Assembly resolution 56/242, the Chairman of the Committee reported that he had sent letters to 11 intergovernmental bodies identified as having consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources during their previous three sessions and had held consultations with their chairpersons and secretaries in an effort to find new and innovative ways of harmonizing the factors of efficiency and the rational use of conference resources.

3. In most cases, the main factor in a low utilization rate was the time lost owing to late starting and/or early ending of meetings. Some chairpersons had expressed dissatisfaction with the methodology of calculating the utilization factor on the grounds that it focused only on the utilization of conference resources while ignoring the ultimate goal of the organs, which was to conduct and finish their business successfully. It was also argued that the methodology was too mechanical for the nature of the mandates of some bodies. However, while the mandates of intergovernmental bodies could not be ignored, the mandate given by the General

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Assembly to the Committee on Conferences was to oversee the utilization of conference services and, in that regard, the methodology for calculating the utilization factor had served a valuable purpose thus far.

4. Some of the ways in which conference services could be used efficiently by the bodies concerned included: improving the accuracy of advanced planning of the number of fully serviced meetings; opening meetings on time, if necessary, even without a quorum, and discussing other items or holding informal consultations if time remained; avoiding cancellations of meetings or cancelling them well in advance; maximizing the option of scheduling informal consultations with interpretation services; and raising awareness among the membership about the underutilization factors, bearing in mind the discontinuation of night and weekend meetings.

Discussion

5. It was pointed out that chairpersons of the Committee on Conferences had been holding consultations with intergovernmental bodies year after year on the utilization of the conference services available to them and that very little had been achieved. Certain chairpersons of bodies seemed to lack the will to cooperate and the arguments they advanced were not convincing. It was time for stricter measures and action, including warning those bodies that their entitlements might be cut.

6. It was suggested that the Committee should identify the main drivers of the shortfall and tailor specific recommendations to those bodies, since heavy users of conference services had a greater impact on the overall utilization rate.

7. Note was taken of the fact, however, that, in a number of cases, the Chairman's consultations with bodies had had a positive impact on the rational and efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources.

Conclusions and recommendations

8. **The Committee on Conferences requested the Chairman to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.**

9. **With regard to changes to the methodology, the Committee considered that the Utilization Factor (UF) was a complex index that incorporated all the aspects of the Meeting Ratio (MR) and the Planning Accuracy Factor (PAF) and included utilization of meeting time as a factor as well. It was therefore clearly superior as an overall measurement of utilization both the MR and the PAF and should thus be kept as the primary index by which utilization performance of intergovernmental bodies was judged.**

10. **The Committee concluded that the explanation given by chairpersons that early endings of meetings could be considered a sign of efficiency was not convincing. It would not be justified to consider a weighted system to account for time lost owing to the early ending of meetings; better planning and flexible adjusting of the programme of work were the best way to reduce time lost in that way.**

11. The Committee welcomed proposals to improve the utilization of those bodies that failed to reach the benchmark figure. The proposals included setting well-defined and achievable objectives for utilization of allocated resources at the organizational meeting of those bodies, such as establishing a higher minimum number of speakers before scheduling a meeting, voting on items in blocks, having back-up agenda items for their daily programme of work, and planning, at the end of a session, the programme of work for the following session.

12. The Committee recommended that, should there be no improvement in the utilization statistics of the most consistent underutilizers, the General Assembly should consider further steps to remedy the situation.